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## **Transcript of FY22 Tribal Transit Competitive Webinar March 24, 2022**

Our agenda today will begin with an overview of FTA's Tribal Transit Program. We'll then discuss this year's FY2022 funding opportunity including eligible projects and evaluation criteria. We will also briefly discuss another funding opportunity from FTA, the Low-No Emission and Bus Competitive program. We'll conclude with an overview of the grants.gov website where applications are submitted for both programs, and a question and answer session, time permitting.

We'll start with an overview of FTA's Tribal Transit Program, otherwise known as TTP. The Tribal Transit Program and its competitive award program helps FTA pursue its objectives by providing timely and efficient investment in public transportation. Providing direct funding to federally recognized Indian tribes to provide public transportation service on and around Indian reservations or tribal land in rural areas. Supporting the President's Building a Better America initiative to mobilize American ingenuity to build a modern infrastructure, and an equitable clean energy future. And advancing the goals of the January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Executive Order on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government.

The history of the Tribal Transit Program with FTA is that it is a set aside of the formula grants for rural areas program, sometimes known as section 5311. The competitive program was created in fiscal year 2006 and initially funded between \$8 and \$15 million per year. In fiscal year 2013, a formula program was added and funded at \$25 million per year with a competitive program funded at \$5 million per year. In 2016, the Formula program was funded at \$30 million per year in the competitive program at \$5 million per year.

With the current Tribal Transit Program, we see an increase in funding by nearly 83%. And instead of a flat amount each year, the Tribal Transit Program now grows with the rural transit program and supports 134 American Indian and Alaska Native tribes with transit service. In this chart you can see this increase in funding for each consecutive year.

Last year's competitive project selections were announced January 19<sup>th</sup> of this year. The original application period was May 27<sup>th</sup>, through August 25<sup>th</sup>, the same year. FTA received for \$18.8 million from 47 American Indian or Alaska Native tribal applicants for 51 project proposals in 14 states. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, FTA announced \$10.3 million in funding to 36 American Indian or Alaska Native tribes for 39 projects in 12 states. This

award was larger than usual due to the one-time inclusion of \$5 million from the American Rescue Plan.

Now onto this year's program. This year there is \$8.75 million available in the tribal transit competitive program. Eligible applicants include federally recognized American Indian or Alaska Native tribes as identified by the US Department of Interior in rural areas with a population of less than 50,000 inhabitants. Available funding. States that FTA may choose to fund the program for more or less than the announcement amount. And for the period of availability, funds are available for obligation the year allocated plus two years for a total of three years. For example, if FTA announces project selections in fiscal year 22, funds would need to be obligated in our grants management system, TrAMS, by the end of fiscal year 24 or September 30th of 2024 . A reminder that the available funds are discretionary, meaning that applications are not guaranteed to be approved.

FTA published a notice of funding opportunity or NOFO on February 16th in the Federal Register. Applications are due on May 25th at 11:59PM Eastern Time. I recommend you read the NOFO specifically sections D and E which explain how to apply and how the applications will be reviewed. It is also recommended you submit your application at least 72 hours ahead of time to correct any problems that arise during submission time. Allowances are not made for technical problems and FTA will not consider applications submitted after the deadline.

A brief overview of projects eligible for this year's program. Include planning projects which are capped at \$25,000. Capital projects which include new services. Replacement buses, equipment or facilities, expansion buses, equipment or facilities. And operating assistance, the costs associated with everyday service. This year all recipients are eligible for operating assistance. Also this year, the eligible federal share is 100% meaning that no local share is necessary. And the funding availability, as mentioned earlier is 3 years. Please note that applications that include requests for more than one project type must identify the specific funds requested for each project type planning, capital and operating.

Planning projects include studies on service feasibility, adding a new service, or updating an existing plan. As mentioned earlier, there's a \$25,000 cap on these types of projects. I will discuss planning projects in more detail later in the presentation.

Capital projects include, but are not limited to, the purchase of expansion or replacement buses or vans. Capital expansion projects include growing your service, describing how current or growing demand for service necessitates the expansion. Capital replacement projects include maintaining your service and should include how the replacement may be necessary to maintain the transit system in a state of good repair. Other capital projects can be for bus related equipment such as fare equipment, communication devices, etc. The construction and rehabilitation of facilities, specifically transit, maintenance and administrative facilities. Mobility management. Wheelchair lifts and restraints. Passenger shelters and bus stop signs and technology, including computer hardware or software.

Operating assistance projects are those costs directly related to service operations and may include fuel, oil drivers, driver and dispatcher salaries and fringe benefits, licenses or service agreements with private providers of public transportation services. Again this year, all eligible recipients can apply for operating assistance.

Moving on to the evaluation criteria for this year's award, I will first discuss capital and operating applications only as they are more thorough. I will speak to the requirements for planning grants later. I'll talk through the specific project evaluation criteria in the sections that you'll see in the application supplemental form. FTA evaluates these projects through different criteria depending on what type of project they are. Capital and operating projects have five required sections in the supplemental form, whereas planning projects have only one required section. If you are submitting a capital and operating project, please make sure that you provide a detailed response to each of these five required categories in advance. I apologize as the first one is a little confusing as it is called planning and local or regional prioritization but does not apply to planning projects only those related to operating assistance and capital. The other four criteria for these types of projects include project readiness, demonstration of need, demonstration of benefits, and financial commitment and operating capacity. They are listed here in the same way presented in both the notice of funding opportunity and the application's supplemental form. I will now go into more detail to how applications are evaluated in each of these criteria.

A written planning section for capital and operating awards will be thorough and specific. It will also identify all aspects of the planning process that led to you identifying the need for your project. In this section you should describe the planning process or document utilized to identify the proposed project. Provide a detailed project description. Describe what opportunities for public participation were provided and how the proposed or existing service has been coordinated with human service agencies intercity bus transportation providers, or other rural public transit providers. Should also discuss the level of support by the community and/or tribal government. This last point can be done by supplying support letters, surveys, or other supporting documentation that backs the justification for the project.

Additional elements of this criterion include describing how the mobility needs of the tribal community were considered. Identifying existing transportation services in and near the proposed or existing service area. Including documenting in detail whether the project will provide coordination opportunities with existing services. Describe how the proposed or existing service complements rather than duplicates any concurrently available service. And finally describe the implementation schedule for the proposed project, including the time period, staffing and procurement. All of these points are necessary to demonstrate the value of the project.

The second criterion, project readiness, requires you to demonstrate the feasibility of your project, your ability to carry it out on time and successfully deliver the outcome through the services that you're proposing. If you're new to being a direct recipient from FTA this is where you demonstrate understanding the time it involves to be involved in an

FTA grant, including getting set up in our electronic grant management system TrAMS. Demonstrating your awareness of all of these aspects of the timeline would make a strong response to project readiness. Additionally, the project readiness factor includes assessing whether the recipient can demonstrate that the project and project funds be implemented and obligated quickly if selected. Demonstrate the ability to carry out the proposed project successfully. And describe the implementation schedule for the project. As mentioned earlier, capital projects can include the purchase of vehicles or facilities. Project readiness is evaluated differently for facilities if you're proposing to build a transit facility, that's going to require an environmental review, and this is where you can discuss and demonstrate that you've anticipated how much time that will take for you to clear those environmental processes. For capital projects, please make sure to describe and document the project implementation plan, such as an initial design of facilities. Also demonstrate the required environmental work that has been initiated or completed for construction projects requiring a categorical exclusion environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act, more commonly referred to as NEPA.

The demonstration of need section is where you tell your story. Not all FTA application reviewers will have experience in rural or tribal transit settings. So, detailing what this project will mean to your community with specificity could go a long way in making a case for your project. Applications will be evaluated based on the degree to which the applicant identifies the need for transit resources. All applications should include a description of the destinations and services not currently available by transit. And the need for access to jobs or health care special needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities income-based communities and those with any other mobility requirements. FTA will consider whether the project represents a time or periodic need that cannot be reasonably funded from FTA program formula allocations or state or local resources.

Capital expansion projects should describe how current or growing demand for the service necessitates the expansion, whereas capital replacement projects should include how the replacement may be necessary to maintain transit assets in a state of good repair, and should include the age of the asset the condition and its performance of the asset being replaced. If an applicant received a planning grant in previous fiscal years, it should indicate the status of the planning study and how the proposed project relates to that study. In this instance, planning grants include those funded by the Tribal Transit Program or other funding sources.

The demonstration of benefits criterion should address the needs discussed in the previous criterion. You should explain how these investments will improve the quality of life for the tribal nation and surrounding communities in which it is located. FTA will rate proposals based on the quality and extent to which they discuss the following four factors. The project's ability to improve transit efficiency or increase ridership. Whether the project will improve or maintain mobility or eliminate gaps in service for the Indian tribe. Whether the project will improve or maintain access to important destinations and services. And any other qualitative benefits such as greater access to jobs education and health care services along with environmental considerations.

Additionally, under this criterion, you should identify expected or achieved project benefits in the following. For existing services, mention increased or sustained ridership and daily trips. Improved service operations and coordination and provide the actual number of individual writers, and trips for startup projects. Estimate the number of daily one-way trips. Qualitative benefits to the tribal nation and surrounding community.

The fifth and final criterion for capital and operating projects is financial commitment and operating capacity based upon the information provided, proposals in this category will be rated on the extent to which the proposal demonstrates the Tribal Transit Program funding does not replace existing funding. The applicant will provide non-financial support to the project. The applicant is able to demonstrate a sustainable funding plan. And project funds are used in coordination with other services for efficient utilization of funds. For fiscal year 2022, no local match is needed. If you are including it, the source must be identified, but again, it is not required. Also, should identify a sustainable funding plan. Demonstrate how the applicant plans to maintain operations once the project is funded. And include an annual operating budget for the transit system service. In thinking about the financial sustainability of the project, applicants should identify how the tribe will maintain the project past the life of the grant.

As mentioned earlier, if you're submitting a request for a planning grant, there's only one section to complete. This section is less prescriptive than the previous ones for capital and operating awards. For planning grants, applicants should describe the need and the general scope of the proposed study. In one section, proposal should address two key points. One, the recipient's long-term commitment to transit. And two, how the proposed study will be implemented or further tribal transit. Again, there is a \$25,000 cap on planning grant awards.

This presentation will be published on our Tribal Transit competitive website. And this includes some important links to the notice of funding opportunity. The application page in grants.gov. FTA's Tribal Entities landing page. And this year's award competitive award webpage.

Additionally, we have technical assistance centers contact information included here. These entities may be able to provide guidance related to the Tribal Transit Program.

FTA divides the country into 10 regions with offices in each. This map will show you based on where you are located in the United States, what region corresponds to FTA, and they would be your most immediate contact for questions related to this award.

### **Information Related to Joint Low-No and Bus Competitive Program**

Before we begin the grants.gov section of the presentation I want to notify you that there is another funding opportunity for tribal entities currently available through FTA. And that is the joint Low-No Emission and Bus Competitive award opportunity. The Bus and Bus Facilities competitive program makes federal resources available to States and direct

recipients to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment to the Low and No Emission vehicle program, sometimes referred to as “Low-No”. It provides funding to state and local government authorities for the purchase or lease of zero emission and low emission transit buses as well as the acquisition, construction and leasing are required supporting facilities. This year over \$1.7 billion is available in combined funding. Eligible applicants include designated recipients, states, local government authorities, and Indian tribes.

This joint notice of funding opportunity was published on March 4th and applications are due on May 31st at 11:59 pm Eastern Time. If you are applying to both the Low-No and Bus competitive programs the application package must be submitted to both opportunity ideas in [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). Additionally, FTA will host a webinar similar to this one for rural and tribal applicants to the Low-No Emission and Bus Competitive program March 30th at 2pm Eastern Time.

There are some differences in the evaluation criteria. From the Tribal Transit Program and the low no emission and bus competitive program for example, the local financial commitment for tribal transit is waived and funded at 100% federal share. However, for Low-No Emission and Bus Competitive programs, that local financial commitment will be between 10-20%, depending on the type of project, and the local financial commitment may not be waived for hardship. The project implementation strategy is slightly different than Tribal Transit which uses the term project readiness. Through the Low-No Emission and Bus Competitive program, it is more specific in that FTA will rate projects higher if grant funds can be obligated within 12 months of selection in the project can be implemented within a reasonable time frame.

Other differences include the demonstration of benefits for the Low and No Emission program. FTA will consider the quality and extent to which applications demonstrate how the proposed project will reduce energy consumption harmful emissions and direct carbon emissions.

Demonstration of benefits for the Bus Competitive program. Applicants will be evaluated based on how they describe how the proposed project will improve the condition of the transit system and reliability of transit service for its writers, and access and mobility within the service area, particularly for low income or underserved communities and people with disabilities such as shorter headways. New transportation choices or eliminating gaps in the transportation network. If you have questions you can use the email address [ftalownobusnofo@dot.gov](mailto:ftalownobusnofo@dot.gov). Or feel free to contact me and I can put you in touch with the correct destination.

### **Applying for FTA Awards through Grants.gov**

I would like to introduce my colleague Johnita Glover. Who will walk us through the grant application process in [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

Hello everyone, I am Johnita Glover with the Office of Grants Management and in this portion of the webinar I will provide an orientation on the resources available to applicant organizations on the FTA website, Grants.gov website and on the application process.

FTA funded opportunities are published on the FTA website, the Federal Register and on the grants.gov website. We recommend applicants begin their search and application process on the FTA notice of funding opportunity webpage using a page as your start provides links to related information, websites and resources to assist with the application process. To locate the NOFO page, go to the FTA homepage, which is FTA.gov. At the top of the web page, click on funding and select apply. Then click on notice of funding on the left side of the page. The notice of funding page provides links to all the current or active FTA opportunities available. Select the opportunity ID, which is hyperlinked to the FTA website page. If you click on grant program this link brings you to the program page which is sponsoring the discretionary funding. If you would like to search for old or expired notices, they are available on a separate menu directly under the notice of funding.

So, as I mentioned, the FTA NOFO page contains a summary of the opportunity announcement. Important dates such as the application deadline, brief explanation of eligibility requirements, and links to the grants.gov site. Additionally, it has the FTA supplemental form Federal Register notice and other relevant information about FTA programs which may assist in developing and submitting a successful proposal or application. The supplemental form is a fillable PDF which is an FTA product. It is used to capture the key elements of the applicants proposing this form contains filling blanks for information which will be used by FTA to evaluate the proposed projects and funding requested. The form must be attached to the application in grants.gov in order to receive consideration. We ask that you do not use forms from prior years or attempt to create your own PDF in lieu of the supplemental form that we provide specifically for this opportunity. Please use only current forms provided on the FTA website or in grants.gov. Also, please do not attempt to attach images or scan copies of the supplemental form. The PDF form must be completed with type text and attached to the application in grants.gov. You can navigate directly to the grants.gov site by selecting the blue hyperlink opportunity ID on an official page.

So, once you select the blue hyperlink opportunity ID, you will be taken to the grants.gov site. The grants.gov Grant Opportunity page contains tabs. The synopsis version, history related documents, and package. This is also where you can begin to apply for the funding opportunity. The Synopsis tab provides similar information which we published on the FTA website but also shows if any changes have been posted. Additionally, it provides key dates and related regulatory references. The version history tab will show a history of any changes made since the original announcement. The related document tab leads to a folder which contains documents related to the funding opportunity. It includes items such as the Federal Register notice, the FTA supplemental form, or other related documents. The package tab contains the references and links to download and apply for this opportunity. And just to note that anyone can download the application package, but

only individuals who have been designated and grants.gov as the authorized organizational representative can submit the application.

This slide shows the contents of the application package available in grants.gov which includes the mandatory SF, the lobbying form, and the attachment form used to attach supporting materials for the application. However, it does not include the FTA supplemental form.

This slide depicts a screenshot of the FTA supplemental form. Each opportunity has its own form. The supplemental form must be downloaded separately from the FTA website or from within a related documents tab. The form should be attached to the application or the attachments form. The attachment form is away for applicants to include supporting documents to your application. I will mention again that the supplemental form is a fillable PDF that's used to capture the information FTA needs to evaluate the proposed project. The DF must be filled in with text, otherwise FTA will reject the application and please again do not submit forms from prior years or from other programs other than was stated on the supplemental form.

So, applicants who have not previously applied on grants.gov must visit grants.gov and select the applicants tab. Applicants who have previously applied are still encouraged to review the applicants tab to make sure you have the latest information about the application process. The applicants tab will walk you through the process of registering on grants.gov as well as help you check to make sure you have the correct or compatible version of Adobe Acrobat. The site also provides training on the use of grants.gov. Please note that there is an Adobe compatibility check on the site to ensure that you are using the correct version and software packages in order to submit your application. The site also provides the option to download the software if needed. There are many instances where applicants encounter technical issues with submitting. Your application is usually because you're using a different version of Adobe Acrobat. For new applicants to grants.gov or federal funds to grants.gov site assists organizations with the registration process and a system for award management (SAM) and with obtaining a DUNS or now UEI registration.

In the application process, registered organizations can create a workspace in which grant proposal teams can collaborate and develop in the application proposal and associated documents. This workspace eliminates the need for email and documents between team members. Grants.gov allow applicant organizations or workspace in which assign individuals can collaborate share files and perform various tasks to develop the application. This is also the place from which the authorized organization representative can submit the completed application to grants.gov, so please review the workspace information and identify the type of workspace and team members who were prepare your application. Please review the roles and privileges and remember that only the authorized organization representative can submit the application. FTA is accepting applications submitted via grants.gov from organizations and not individuals such organizations must be registered in grants.gov and all the information and pertinent links are available on the applicant tab in the grants.gov site.



If you encounter any technical issues or problems while on the app while submitting your application, please address those concerns directly to the grants.gov applicant support. Any program related questions or issues should be addressed to the FTA program manager.

## **Questions & Answers**

At this point, we're willing to take any questions you may have, which again you will not be able to speak your questions, but you can add them to the question and answer section on the right hand side of your screen and we will do our best to respond to those. Helping me with the question and answer section is my colleague Elan Flippin. Elan, are there any questions submitted thus far?

So, we have a question that has just been submitted and the question is "how would I find out if my tribe has been FTA recipient ID number?" An entity would have a recipient ID number if they were currently in FTA grantee or currently receiving FTA funds. So, if you are not in FTA grantee, you would not have a recipient ID number. You may have to check with your transit grants division of your tribe and to see if you all currently receive FTA funding.

There's another question that is submitted asking, "I would like to know how long the review process will take." That is a great question. We hope to have project selections completed this calendar year, but because there are other programs within FTA, especially this very large Low-No and Bus Competitive program we discussed. Sometimes the review process takes longer than we planned. But we you can always reach out to [tribaltransit@dot.gov](mailto:tribaltransit@dot.gov) to find out the status of the review process.

Great, thank you, there's another question submitted that is asking "if you're applying for capital and operating grants, would they need to be in two separate applications, or can they be in one application?" They can be in one application, but you'll want to make sure you're clearly delineating what funds are going to operating assistance and what funds are going to capital. And also you're going to need to provide justifications in all of the evaluation criteria for both capital and operating projects, so you can combine them, but you will need to be very clear in your explanation for the need and benefits to both.

There's another question that came in asking "will tribes be eligible for these funds if they have already been awarded a competitive grant from another project." The answer to that is absolutely yes. And we do encourage if you are eligible to receive funds from another additional competitive grant program. Yes, you can apply for numerous grants, grants, competitive grants and receive funds under numerous grant programs within FTA.

"Can operational costs be used to pay driver, raises to for staff retention?" The short answer to that is that these funds can be used for any eligible project under the 5311 program. And driver pay and salary is certainly part of that. There is kind of a case by case basis with this you want to make sure that what drivers are being paid is reasonable. I think is what stated in our circular, so I would recommend you reach out to your regional

office to talk about the financial policies of your organization and make sure what you are proposing to pay or drivers falls within that reasonable range.

“Will the FY22 tribal competitive funding require a certification by the tribe that employees were not furloughed?” That’s a great question. Because this does not include American Rescue Plan funding that we do not need a certification of no furlough. This is this regular annual Tribal Transit competitive funding and does not require that certification.

There’s another question coming in asking “there was a note on the supplemental form asking for the annual operating budget of the organization. Is this the budget for my tribal program? Or the budget for the tribe as a whole entity?” That’s another good question I think we could be more specific on this requirement in the future. We’re just looking for the budget related to your transit service. The budget for the entire tribal government is not necessary, simply the aspects of it that relate to providing tribal transit to your region.

“Can this new opportunity funding assist with expansion on an existing facility should it be utilized as a transit facility?” I think if I’m understanding the question if the facility you are looking to expand and it provides either maintenance or administration of the transit program, then it counts as a transit facility and would be eligible under this award. So you can expand on an existing transit facility.

There’s another question that’s “given the length of time it may take to approve awards and given supply chain issues impacting costs for equipment, vehicles, and construction, is there any flexibility in project if there is less funding awarded the needed for the project in example, can projects be scaled back if absolutely necessary?” Within the supplemental form in the application we do ask for project scalability that is, for example, if you’re asking for four new vans. Can you scale that down if you anticipate the costs of those vans coming up? If you could scale it to two or three and that is where you’re going to want to build in the flexibility with the supply chain and rising costs right now, I know it’s difficult to do, and as you mentioned there is a length of time to approve these awards and external supply chain issues, but I would make sure you really give some thought to the question of scalability and make sure that your application reflects that.

There’s another question that has come in “can operational costs be used for equipment purchases?” Generally operating costs are considered those items that have a useful life of less than one year, so we’re looking at salaries, fuel, oil. Typically, equipment is considered a capital purchase unless it is kind of a regular maintenance item like motor oil as mentioned earlier. That is used up relatively quickly. You can reach out to your local regional office if you have a specific example, but generally speaking equipment is a capital expense.

“Some tribes did not receive funds from the CARES Act. Can they apply to this program to claim funds for COVID- related operating expenses?” I think the answer to that is that this program is the regular Tribal Transit funding and it has to be for expenses that have not already been incurred prior to award, or at least prior to the award announcement. There

will be pre-award authority starting at the time that we announced the awards, but if they were expenses that were incurred before we announce that you've received this award, then no they are not eligible. If they are COVID related that you're still having lingering operating expenses that are related to COVID, then that would be eligible.

There's a question related to the Low-No and Bus Competitive grant. "The NOFO mentions that you can apply for up to \$25,000 for planning. Would planning be our project in this instance?" I'm not sure of the planning requirements for the Low-No and Bus Competitive award. That is something you may want to contact [ftalownobusnofo@dot.gov](mailto:ftalownobusnofo@dot.gov). This would probably be your best source for an answer to questions related to Low-No and Bus Competitive award. I know that for this TTP competitive awards there is a cap for planning, but I'm not sure if there is one for Low-No as there are different requirements related to Low-No versus TTP.

And if I haven't addressed the question as you meant it, or anyone who has additional questions that we didn't get to today, you can always email [tribaltransit@dot.gov](mailto:tribaltransit@dot.gov) and get a more specific detailed answer to your question.

Thank you everyone for joining us and feel free to reach out to our office or any of FTA's regional offices if you have additional questions. Enjoy the rest of your day.